

## EPA expands controversial sulfoxaflor registration

July 12, 2019

EPA toxics chief Alex Dunn announced July 12 that the agency has expanded its registration of the insecticide sulfoxaflor, three years after an appellate court vacated the Obama administration’s registration of the product because EPA lacked enough information on risks that it may pose to pollinators.

“We are thrilled to announce EPA has added new uses for the insecticide sulfoxaflor,” Dunn said in a July 12 conference call with reporters.

The new registration allows the chemical to be used on cotton, sorghum and a series of other specialty crops that the Obama administration had precluded from its 2016 registration that it issued following the court ruling.

Environmental groups rejected her arguments, citing new data showing significant losses of honeybees. “At a time when honeybees and other pollinators are dying in greater numbers than ever before, Trump’s EPA decision to remove restrictions on yet another bee-killing pesticide is nothing short of reckless,” Greg Loarie, an attorney with Earthjustice, said in a July 12 statement.

For example, the University of Maryland and University of Auburn announced last month that preliminary results from their annual national survey of beekeepers finds 40.7 percent losses of honey bee colonies between April 2018 and April 2019 -- a slight increase over the annual average of 38.7 percent.

But the analysis also shows the “highest winter loss reported since the survey began 13 years ago and 8.9 percentage points higher than the survey average” for winter losses, at 37.7 percent.

Dunn said the agency’s new action is supported by “substantial data” on human health and environmental effects, including many new studies from Dow, sulfoxaflor’s maker, on the chemical’s effects on bees. She said this included five studies on long-term impact to bee colonies and over a dozen studies on sulfoxaflor residues on various crops.

She said the data EPA has reviewed on sulfoxaflor is “among the largest datasets” of effects of pesticide on bees and determined there are “no data gaps for the new uses that we are implementing today.”

She also argued that EPA’s risk assessment finds that when sulfoxaflor is used according to label instructions, it presents “no significant risk to human health and lower risk to nontarget wildlife,” including birds, mammals, bees, fish and other aquatic animals “when compared to widely used registered alternatives” such as organophosphates, carbamates, and neonicotinoids.

Dunn said that the new studies EPA has reviewed show sulfoxaflor “disappears more quickly than widely-used alternatives thereby lowering risk to bees.” And she noted that the registration requires that all sulfoxaflor products be sold with labels instructing uses on how to reduce pollinators’ exposure. On some crops, sulfoxaflor cannot be applied during bloom, as well as spray drift restrictions to reduce the insecticide’s movement.

Dunn also pointed to sulfoxaflor’s value to users against sugar cane aphids and lamp bugs, noting that these pests “can cause significant economic loss, up to 50 percent loss.” As a result, EPA has since 2012 approved some 120 requests from states for emergency exemptions to allow for its use before it was registered on certain crops.

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